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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION IN THE
NORMANDY LANDING 5-10 JUNE 1944 (NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
General Subject Monograph

Type of operation described: AIRBORNE DIVISION
SPEARHEADING THE INVASION OF A STRONGLY FORTIFIED
COASTAL POSITION

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NUMBER ONE


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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION IN THE
NORMANDY LANDING 5-10 JUNE 1944 (NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 101st Airborne Division in the invasion of Normandy during the period 5-10 June 1944.

To orient the reader, a brief discussion will be made of the major events which contributed to this action.

The first U. S. - British plans for a cross channel invasion were drawn up in the early months of 1942 and were known as Operation Roundup. This plan called for an invasion date of 1 April 1943, with an emergency date of 15 September 1942. The emergency plan was known as Sledgehammer. It was not to have been put into effect unless the Russian situation became desperate. (1)

A second plan, known as Torch, calling for the invasion of North Africa in November, 1942, was actually executed.

The invasion of Sicily came in July, 1943, in execution of Operation Husky. Later in the same year, our forces gained a foothold on the Italian mainland.

While operations in the Mediterranean were underway, plans for the 1944 channel crossing continued to take shape. The decision to invade France was made at a Washington Conference in May, 1943, attended by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff. (2)

(1) A-1, p. 5
(2) A-1, p. 51

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In July, 1943, the initial draft of the plan for the Invasion of France, known as Operation Overlord, was approved. It called for a landing between Le Havre and the Cherbourg Peninsula. Subsequently, General Eisenhower called for the increase of the landing beach areas, which resulted in the addition of Utah Beach to previously selected sites. (3)

Invasion plans called for the liberation of France, Belgium and Holland, after the channel crossing to France sometime in June. Until then, the United States had been at war for nearly three years and was engaged in ground combat in the Mediterranean and Pacific areas. Germany had been at war for five years. Its ground forces were dispersed on three fronts, the largest number fighting against Russia, a smaller group in Italy and the Balkans, with the balance in defensive positions scattered throughout Europe. Hitler bragged that his defenses on the northwest coast of Europe were impregnable. By June, 1944, the Germans had lost control of the air and of the coastal waters. A year of strategic bombing by the allies had crippled Germany's War Industry as well as its air force.

The invasion was designed to conclude the third phase of the grand strategy of the allies. The first phase had been to hold the enemy, the second to drive him from the offensive to defensive and the third was to take the offensive and defeat him. (4)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

By June, 1944, the German defenses along the Cotentin Peninsula, in the northwest section of France, were formidable, but as the invasion proved, not impregnable. Due to their dispersion and heavy losses, the enemy was unable to adequately defend the entire coast.

(3) A-1, p. 52

(4) A-3,

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They planned their principal defense line to be the line of beaches. Mobile reserves were to be in position to counterattack at any coastal point. Beach defenses were to be protected by concrete and armor in proportion to their proximity to our air and naval bases. Their air and naval bases and headquarters were to be protected in case of air or airborne attack. The Germans made extensive use of obstacles of all kinds including minefields, inundations, walls, underwater obstacles, and anti-air landing obstacles. The low lying ground behind Utah Beach was flooded as well as the marshy valleys of the Douve and Taute Rivers at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. Anti-air landing obstacles were constructed as early February, 1944. These consisted largely of poles six (6) inches thick and eight (8) or more feet in height extending above the ground. A series of aerial photographs, taken just before the invasion, indicated a studding of stakes and poles on possible parachute and glider landing fields. These anti-air landing obstacles were incomplete on D day and were not very effective.

Sixteen coastal batteries, averaging four to six guns, were registered to fire in the American assault area. Most of the batteries were 75-105 millemeters, however, there were two (2) batteries of 155mm guns, one 170 mm and one 210mm battery. A number of the batteries were put out of action before the landing by either the intensive air bombardment or sea bombardment in the initial stages of the landing. (5)

On D day, the 709th German Infantry Division, was garrisoned in Cherbourg and the western tip of the Cotentin Peninsula. The 243rd German Infantry Division was stationed north of La Haye du Puits, garrisoning the northwest coast of the peninsula.

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SYMBOL
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N MAP A

The 352nd Infantry Division was stationed to the east of Carentan. The 91st Division extended in a northwesterly direction from Carentan. The 6th Paratroop Rifle Regiment was located southwest of Carentan. Adhering to the view of Field Marshall Rommel to the effect that all reserves should be moved as close to the coast as possible, in May, 1944, the Germans moved the 21st SS Panzer Division, the 12th SS Panzer Division and the 2nd Panzer Division into Normandy. The twenty-first was moved within ten miles of Caen and the other two to the Alencon-Evreux region. (6) See Map (A).

TERRAIN ANALYSIS

The Douve River is the dominant terrain feature of the south of the Cotentin Peninsula. It together with the Merderet River drains the major portion of the Peninsula. It flows south and southeast then turns to the sea. Neither river has high banks. Their widths do not present insurmountable obstacles. The rivers flow through flat bottom lands and meadows.

CLOSE TO SOURCE

// A lock and dam at La Barquette, just north of Carentan, controls the drainage of most of the bottom lands. High tide finds the low marshlands of the Douve and Merderet below sea level. By opening the locks, the surrounding lands can be converted into shallow lakes, which coupled with water meadows and undrained swamp land of the Prairies Marecageuses to the south could isolate the Cotentin, restricting all land traffic to established routes through Carentan and Pont L'Abbe on the east and to a narrow strip of land between St. Lo d'ourville and St. Sauveur de Pierre Pont on the west. Blocking of these routes and the seizure of the La Barquette locks would permit the establishment of an easily defended military

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line in the south protecting the rear and the west flank of forces pushing northward against Cherbourg. (7) The inundated area extending for a mile behind the beaches between the mouth of the Douve and Quineville was also of military importance because it restricted the exploitation of the initial landing by canalizing the advance from the beach over narrow causeways and also facilitated the enemy's defense of the area. (8) See Map (B)

VII CORPS PLANS

Neptune, the assault phase of Operation Overlord, called for a simultaneous landing on two main beaches, one designated Utah and the other Omaha in the First Army sector which constituted the right flank of the Allied Invasion Plan. The VII Corps, with the 4th Infantry Division making the assault by sea on Utah Beach and the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions landing by air in the rear of German coastal defenses, was to establish a beachhead in the vicinity of Varreville, then proceed on to capture Cherbourg. The ^{COMMITMENT} commission of these two airborne units in the same operation as the British 6th Airborne Division in the British Sector constituted the greatest use of airborne units up to this time. The V Corps, including the First and Twenty-Ninth Divisions was to establish a beachhead near St. Laurent sur Mer. The First Engineer Special Brigade was assigned to assist the VII Corps by operating on shore the installations necessary to speed debarkation, supply and evacuation. (9)

The VII Corps invasion area was selected because it was felt that a landing on Cotentin proper would insure the early capture of the port of Cherbourg. The need for port capacity influenced tactical planning.

The mission^s of the airborne units ^{were} was to seize crossings or destroy bridges over the Merderet and Douve Rivers and secure vital exits of causeways leading inland

- (7) A-4, p. 3
(8) A-4, p. 3
(9) A-2, p. 26

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from the beaches across inundated areas thus facilitating the expansion of the beachhead by seaborne troops. The airborne units were to be under First Army control until landing at which time they were to come under VII Corps control.

The VII Corps plan of operations, issued on 27 March 1944, provided that the 101st Airborne Division would land southeast of Ste Mere Eglise, destroy the bridges in the vicinity of Carentan and seize the crossings over the Douve at Pont L'Abbe and Benzeville la Bastille to protect the southern flank of the VII Corps east of St. Sauveur-le Vicomte. (10) *A 4 P 7*

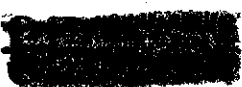
The 82nd Airborne Division was to land west of St. Sauveur le Vicomte and block the movement of enemy reinforcements into the western half of the Peninsula. This plan for the commitment of the airborne units was revised when it was learned toward the end of May that the German 91st Infantry Division had moved into the Peninsula, thus constituting a serious threat to an airborne landing. A new order issued 28 May 1944, assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division the task of securing the western edge of the bridgehead by the capture of Ste. Mere Eglise, a key communication center, and by establishing deep bridgeheads over the Merderet on the two main roads westward of St. Mere Eglise. *A-4 P 10*

The 4th Infantry Division was to assault Utah Beach at H hour, establish a beachhead then move toward Cherbourg assisted by the 90th Division which was to land on D plus 1. The ninth Division was to land on D plus 4, assemble in Corps reserve and be prepared for operations toward the northwest.

MISSIONS OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION *A-4 P 10*

The 101st Airborne Division, composed of the 501st, 502nd, 506th Parachute Regiments and the 327th Glider Infantry

(10) A-4, P. 7



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Regiments were assigned the following missions:

1. Destroy the enemy coastal battery west of Ste Martin de Varreville. (502nd Precht Inf)
2. Seize the western edge of the inundated area back of Utah beach, the exits of four roads from the beach between Ste Martin de Varreville and Pouppeville to permit the 4th Infantry Division to use the causeways at H Hour. (502nd and 506th Parachute Infantry) Exits 3 and 4 were assigned as the mission of the 3rd Battalion by the Regiment.
3. Establish a bridgehead south of the Douve River to permit a drive toward Carentan to weld the VII and V Corps beachheads. (506th Precht. Inf.)
4. Destroy the railroad and highway bridges northwest of Carentan. (501st Precht. Inf. less the 3rd Bn.)
5. Seize and hold the la Barquette lock and establish two bridgeheads over the Douve at Le Port, northeast of Carentan. (501st Precht. Inf)
6. Defend the line of the Douve and Merderet Rivers and prepare for demolition two wooden bridges leading from Carentan to the sea. (506th and 501st Precht. Inf.)
7. Mop up a group of buildings thought to be German Artillery quarters west of St. Martin de Varreville. (502nd. Precht. Inf.)
8. Protect the southern flank of the VII Corps, east of the Merderet.
9. After being relieved by the 4th Division in the beach area, the 101st was to seize Carentan and establish contact with the Fifth Corps, thus consolidating the Omaha and Utah Beachheads. (11)

(11) A-1, p 60
A-4, p 14, 17
A-6

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MOVEMENT PLANS:

The 101st was scheduled to commence dropping at H minus five hours. At dawn, H minus 2, they were to be reinforced by approximately 150 glider troops from fifty one CG 4A Gliders, carrying headquarters personnel. At dusk, H plus 15, an additional 165 troops in 32 horse gliders were to arrive, composed of communication and medical personnel. Pathfinders were to precede the main elements by half an hour to mark the drop zones, of which there were three in the 101st area.

One battalion of the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment as well as the combat vehicles of the Division were scheduled to be landed during the first tide on Utah Beach. The remainder of the Glider Infantry Regiment and the QM Transportation were to be brought in during the second tide.

The Division was to be reinforced by the attachment of tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion, the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and a troop of the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, when these were landed by sea. (12)

The 9th Air Force was to provide protection for the cross channel movement. After H hour the tactical Air Forces were to be called to support the ground troops in their advance inland.

TRAINING OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION IN ENGLAND

The 101st Airborne Division, which had been activated 16 August 1942 at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, started its trek to England in August 1943, after participation in maneuvers in South Carolina and War Games in Tennessee in the early months of 1943.

In England, the training program of the Division stressed physical conditioning, small unit tactical training

(12) A-4, p. 17

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and general subjects including among other subjects map reading and first aid. Men were instructed eight hours per week in night operations and an hour a day was devoted to training in close combat. Twenty-five mile marches were frequently conducted. Special courses were given in booby traps, the removal of mines and in pathfinder duties.

In August, 1943, a few of the higher ranking officers of the 101st, including General Lee, the Division Commander and Colonel Millener of Division Headquarters, were acquainted with the Wadham plan, which was intended to deceive the enemy by creating the illusion of an invasion. Some experience in staff planning was derived as a result of this plan, though its execution which allegedly entailed the invasion of the Brest Peninsula never materialized.

Operation Rankin also provided valuable experience for those who worked out the plans for its execution down to company level. This operation was known to only a few officers and was to be carried out only in case of a German surrender before the Normandy Invasion.

Later a series of coordinated exercises were conducted in England to practice the Neptune phase of Operation Overlord. The 101st took part in three practice exercises, the first of which was known as Beaver. It was held in Torquay, Devonshire. The terrain in this locality was very similar to that existing on Utah beach. Though in this exercise the troops were either marched or trucked to their simulated drop zones, difficulties in gaining coordination and communication with other participating units was encountered.

A later exercise, Tiger, conducted between 23-30 April, in the same area as Beaver, taught the need for more detailed planning and communication of information to lower units. Two LSTs were sunk by German torpedo boats in the conduct of this rehearsal.

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The Division's final dress rehearsal, Exercise Eagle, was held May 9-12. Airborne troops were moved to the same airports from which they were later to take off in the invasion. Personnel and equipment were as far as possible loaded in the same aircraft in which they would later embark for Normandy. The take offs, drops and assembly areas were patterned as closely to the Neptune plan as permissible for the participating parachute and glider echelons. Due largely to pilot error, twenty-eight planes returned to their departure areas without dropping their paratroopers, many paratroopers were dropped in the wrong drop zones and only 44 of 55 gliders landed in their correct fields.

The afore-mentioned exercises tended to confuse the enemy since his intelligence agencies reported each massing of invasion armadas, causing German defenses to be alerted.

(13)

MOVEMENT TO MARSHALLING AREAS

In the middle of May, the 101st began moving to assigned airdromes and marshalling areas extending from Newbury to Exeter in the south of England, where a security seal was imposed. Parachute elements went to the same airfields from which only a few days before they had enplaned during the conduct of exercise Eagle. Pilots of the planes to be used in the channel crossing were the same 1X Troop Carrier Pilots with whom the Division had worked for the past seven to eight months. While at the marshalling areas, men were kept busy trying on and adjusting chutes, packing the parapak equipment bundles, loading and lashing in gliders. They were also briefed on the coming operation, received final issues of supplies and waterproofed vehicles.

(14)

BRIEFING OF PATHFINDER PERSONNEL

All officers and men participating in the Pathfinder

(13) A-1, p. 60

(14) A-1, p. 71

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Operation lived in one area surrounded by double apron barbed wire, patrolled by sentries. Service personnel lived within the area occupied by the airborne troops. The strictest security was enforced in respect to the safe-keeping of maps, aerial photographs, sand tables and field orders.

Each man was required to memorize the road net in his landing area and to draw a sketch of it from memory.

Daily intelligence reports kept troops posted concerning enemy activity in the landing areas.

Officers and NCOs were supplied with 1/35,000 and 1/100,000 maps of the operational area. Men in lower grades carried 1/50,000 and 1/100,000 of the drop zone area and vicinity.

Smoke grenades, fragmentation grenades, panels, ammunition for weapons and rations, issued to the pathfinders in accordance with the Division SOP for a combat load, were increased by as much as 80% by some of the men due to their inexperience. Much of this was abandoned shortly after the drop.

Each team was supplied with Thompson sub-machine guns for the team leader, assistant team leader and the light team leader. Bureka operators carried carbines and pistols, while the light team personnel were armed with M-1 rifles. Up to six fragmentation grenades were issued to each man. Pathfinders had been ordered to use grenades and knives in the drop zone area to limit the disclosure of their positions.

Musette bags were generally overloaded by the men in the marshalling areas. Items should be limited to bare essentials. ATL

First aid equipment issued consisted of 1 bottle of halizone tablets, 2 dressings, 12 packets of sulfanilamide, 1 packet first aid and 1 box of morphine surettes.

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Uniforms consisted of impregnated jump suits, with a wool shirt and trousers underneath. The impregnate proved unnecessary as no gas was encountered but it helped to make the uniform wind and water proof. Jump suits had also been sprayed with light green paint to provide better camouflage. This also tended to wind and waterproof the garment. (15)

Pathfinders were formed into groups which were assigned the mission of marking drop zones with haliphane and radar navigational aides. One officer and seven enlisted men were attached to each group for security to protect men engaged in setting up lights and other navigational aides. (16)

Final briefing of Pathfinders was held at 2000, 5 June, following which all parachute personnel proceeded to their aircraft.

NARRATION

MOVEMENT OF PATHFINDERS TO THE OBJECTIVE

Pathfinder teams took off from North Witham Air-drome commencing at 2150, 5 June, 1944 at five minute intervals. Immediately after crossing the French coast line, flak and heavy machine gun fire was encountered which continued until the jump was made.

Group A jumped at approximately 0015 in the vicinity of St. Germain de Varreville. Teams were assembled within fifteen minutes. The Eureka was functioning by 0030 and lights were on by 0040. No enemy was encountered in the immediate vicinity of the area. The first of the serials from the 502nd assigned to this drop zone arrived at 0057. Lights and Eurekas remained on until 0310 to guide in stray aircraft at which time the pathfinders joined units of the 1st Battalion, 502nd Parachute Infantry and later in the day reported to their Division Command Post.

(15) A-7, p. 1, 2, 3

(16) A-7, p. 4

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Teams one and three of Group C landed at approximately 0027 in the vicinity of Hiesville, where they encountered heavy machine gun fire. In spite of this, within ten minutes two Eurekas, two lights and receiver-transmitter of the beeps beacon had been assembled. Due to engine trouble the aircraft carrying team two was forced down in the channel. The power unit for the Beeps Beacon had been lost through enemy action and since only two lights remained available, no T could be formed. This, as well as other experiences, points to the desirability of dropping duplicate sets of equipment on each drop zone. ATL

Group D jumped approximately 1000 yards north west of St. Come du Mont at 0042, 5 June 1944, where they were met by intense German anti aircraft and machine gun fire. Assembly of the three teams was impossible. A fight started as soon as the paratroopers worked free of their chutes. One Eureka was set into operation and one light made to function, but this was later destroyed by enemy fire. No troops were discharged by serials which followed later in the immediate vicinity of the pathfinders. Twenty-three of the fifty-four officers and men in this group were carried missing in action.

Group E of the Pathfinders executed their jump landing at 0029. Its teams were assembled within ten minutes at which time they moved to their landing zones and set up the Eurekas. Both teams established Ts and made contact with approaching aircraft at 0040.

All pathfinder personnel at the Division Command Post assisted in marking the glider landing zone near Hiesville on the night of 6 June 1944. The Eureka was established at 2030 and in operation by 2050. Smoke grenades were set off at 2057 when gliders came into view. (17)

(17) A-7, p. 6



MOVEMENT OF PARATROOPER SERIALS

At 2215 on D-1, twenty minutes after the pathfinders had departed from North Witham Airdrome, four hundred and thirty two C 47s commenced their departure from seven airdromes scattered throughout the south of England with 6,600 paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division aboard. They had been scheduled to commence dropping at H minus five hours. (18)

When the leading echelons reached the coast of France a thick barrage of ack ack fire enveloped them. Transports and gliders were ~~practically~~ under continuous fire and broke formation. In their jumps, ~~sticks~~ of paratroopers were widely dispersed over a wide area. Units were badly scattered and intermingled on landing. Instead of fully assembled units, individuals and small groups of men from different organizations joined together to fight the enemy. Dispersion would have been greater if hostile air attacks had been made against the transport serials, however fighter protection was ample and effective. ~~Enemy~~ anti-aircraft fire may have been lessened by attacks on the part of our supporting planes against these positions. (19) All

At 0125, the first of the three serials arrived, dropping troops in the general area of the drop zone. The second and third serials followed with a few minutes interval.

Their training as individual fighters stood the paratroopers in good stead, particularly so because the majority of men on landing had no opportunity to secure their heavy arms and equipment.

All things considered, the division did not have a good drop. About 1500 troops were either killed or captured and approximately 60% of the equipment dropped was lost when the bundles fell into swamps or fields covered by enemy fire.

(20) See Map (C)

(18) A-4, p. 14

(19) A-6, p. 10

(20) A-4, p. 14

Hostile reaction was immediate as soon as the drop was commenced. German positions were found to be well organized, however the enemy was reluctant to move out of his prepared defenses to attack. When enemy attacks were made they were seldom pushed vigorously. The confusion of the enemy tended to offset that of our own troops. (21)

Aside from the effects of the scattered airborne drops, part of the confusion of the enemy can be attributed to the bombing raids which commenced in the early morning hours of D day and which had for their targets the known coastal batteries. Also, shortly before H hour, 0730, the 9th Airforce dropped several hundred tons of bombs on enemy defenses in the Utah Beach Area. Airborne movements were of course, coordinated with these raids. Prior to the invasion, air strikes had as their objectives the neutralization of fortifications, demoralization of the enemy troops and the disruption of enemy transportation and communication.

Fifty-one Waco gliders, carrying command personnel and anti tank weapons came in early on D day morning. Never before had this type of landing been attempted in darkness. Though many gliders were wrecked as they landed, entailing the loss of personnel and equipment, losses were not excessive and the mission was in general a success. The gliders were under heavy anti aircraft fire during their trip across the Peninsula.

Landing of the thirty-two larger Horsa type gliders, at 2100, on D day, carrying command, communication, as well as medical personnel and equipment, suffered heavier losses in gliders and personnel because of the unsuitability of the craft for the small landing fields. Equipment, however suffered little damage.

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ACTIVITIES OF 101ST AIRBORNE UNITS ON D DAY

The four serials of the 502nd Parachute Infantry came in ten minutes apart, the second battalion leading with Regimental Headquarters, followed by the Third and First Battalions accompanied by the Artillery Battalion. Having failed to land in drop zone A as planned, a large percentage of the Second Battalion came down on the southern edge of drop zone C. Assembly consumed most of the day and the battalion was unable to fight as a unit during the day.

The Third Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Robert G. Cole, landed several hundred yards east of St. Mere Eglise, where he collected about thirty men from various units including the 506th Parachute Infantry as well as the 82nd Airborne. While moving his group to the two northern exits of the beach, his command snowballed to seventy-five. Lt. Col. Cole split his force to seize beach exits three and four.

At 0930, the enemy began retreating across causeway three from the beach and were met by devastating fire from Lt. Col Cole's group. Fifty to seventy-five Germans were killed and many captured. At 1300, the Third Battalion contacted the First Battalion of the 8th Infantry, 4th Division. By the days end, Lt. Col. Cole had 250 men in his group. That night his Battalion was ordered to assemble in the vicinity of Bloisville as Regimental Reserve.

The First Battalion of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, lead by Lt. Col. Cassidy, had a stiff fight for its D day objective after landing near St. Germain de Varreville, a mile from its first objective, the artillery garrison buildings designated as WXYZ. His force, collected from his own Battalion, found their first objective, a house at the cross roads west of St. Martin de Varreville, occupied by a dozen men under Lt. Col. Steve A. Chappius of the Second Battalion.

Defenses were established at St. Martin de Varreville to prevent the enemy from moving to the beach area. Fighting at buildings X, Y, and Z continued for most of the day. At 1530, the Germans were driven from the last of the buildings. Company C was ordered to Beuzeville while B Company reassembled in the Artillery Barracks. (22)

The 506th Parachute Regiment was widely scattered during its drop. Ten of the eighty-one planes scheduled to drop on Zone C arrived there. It immediately became engaged in a stiff fight along the back edges of the inundated area.

Elements of the 1st Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Turner, were delayed in their advance on Pouppeville.

The 2nd Battalion, 506th, under Lt. Col. Robert L. Strayer, advanced on exit #2, the Battalion having achieved a rapid assembly of about two hundred men. It was held up between Foucarville and St. Germain de Varreville by machine gun and artillery fire. Part of Company D by-passed the enemy and reached exit #2 at 1300. By 1800, the Battalion organized at Houdienville.

The Regimental Headquarters at Culeville had no contact with the Second and Third Battalions. Colonel Sink, the Regimental Commander, sent out patrols to attempt contact but this was achieved only with isolated enemy groups. As reinforcements gathered, by the trickling of men into the CP, Colonel Sink sent a group to aid an element of the 506th which was attacking a previously unlocated enemy 105mm gun position. Led by Captain Patch, the same element attacked St. Marie du Mont simultaneously with elements of the 4th Infantry Division. When forces of the 2nd Battalion arrived that evening, Colonel Sink

had a force of approximately six hundred and fifty men, however, there was still no contact with the Third Battalion.

Unknown to the Regimental Commander, a small force of the Third Battalion of slightly more than platoon strength under Captain Shettle, seized the Le Port Bridges by 0430. They crossed to the other side but were driven back by superior forces. Captain Shettle had set up a defensive line along the Division's southern flank. (23)

Completion of the Division's defensive line in the south was the mission of the First and Second Battalions of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Johnson. The First Battalion was to seize the lock on the Douve at La Barquette and the Second Battalion was to blow the bridges on the road from St. Come du Mont to Carentan. The Regiment had also been ordered to take St. Come du Mont, but this proved impossible on D Day.

Upon landing, Colonel Howard R. Johnson collected about a hundred and fifty men, principally from the 506th Parachute Regiment and moved to the Douve River Locks in La Barquette. The locks were taken by a force of about fifty of Colonel Johnson's men. The Colonel then sent patrols out to the bridges two thousand yards up the river, but their movements were stopped by heavy enemy fire. Leaving defenses at the lock, Colonel Johnson then proceeded with about fifty men north to Bse Addeville, a thousand yards to the northwest, where Major Allen, Regimental S-3 had gathered a force of about a hundred men. Colonel Johnson then returned to La Barquette with part of the combined forces with the intention of moving on the bridges upstream. Having learned that about two hundred and fifty men of the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Regiment had gathered under Col. Ballard at Les Droueries,

(23) A-4, p22-24

Colonel Johnson wished to join forces with this group. Unfortunately, he was separated from Col. Ballard by enemy forces. Colonel Johnson moved his force toward La Barquette at 1330, but was met by enemy artillery and mortar fire coming from St. Come du Mont and Carentan. A Lt. Farrell, a naval shore fire control officer, contacted the Quincy, which was just off shore, and silenced the fire. Colonel Johnson resumed his efforts to take the Douve Bridges, but his efforts were repelled by the enemy.

By the end of the day, Colonel Johnson had accomplished only a part of the Regimental Mission, the part assigned to the First Battalion. The Second Battalion had been held up near St. Come du Mont and was never able to move to the Carentan Bridges. The 501st had secured the look at La Barquette, but strong resistance prevented the capture of St. Come du Mont as well as the destruction of the railroad and highway bridges north of Carentan. (24)

In spite of the fact that fighting had not gone according to plan, the 101st accomplished the most important of its D day missions by clearing the way for the movement of the seaborne forces inland. See Map (D)

The weakest feature at the end of D day was the lack of communication. Also, a time lag of six hours between the time of request and the time of execution of air support missions, nullified their effect at the critical time. (25)

ACTIVITIES ON D PLUS ONE

Most of the action of the 101st Airborne Division on D plus one involved the destruction of scattered enemy groups within the beachhead perimeter. Sizeable enemy pockets existed which had to be eliminated to establish communication and supply lines.

(24) A-4 p.23-30

SECRET

Part of D plus One was also spent moving the First and Second Battalions of the 506th Parachute Infantry and the Second Battalion of the 501st into position for an attack on St. Come du Mont. To this force was added a Battalion of the 401st Glider Infantry, which had arrived by sea, also the Third Battalion of the 501st Parachute Battalion as well as nearly two Battalions of Artillery and some light tanks. See Map (E)

Captain Shettle's group at Le Port was engaged by elements of the German 6th Parachute Regiment, however, the enemy's attempt to reach the bridges held by this group was repelled. The same German unit, supported by mortars and artillery, attacked Colonel Johnson's position. With ammunition near exhaustion, Colonel Johnson's group fortunately stopped the attack. Many of the enemy surrendered. (26)

ACTIVITIES OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION ON D PLUS 2

Since the capture of St. Come du Mont would permit the advance toward Carentan and the relief of Colonel Johnson's group in the La Barquette Lock Area, the attack on the town was scheduled for 0445. Infantry were to move toward St. Come du Mont behind a rolling barrage of the 65th Field Artillery Battalion. Attacking forces included five battalions under Colonel Sink among which were the First and Second Battalions of the 506th, the Second and Third Battalions of the 501st and the Third Battalion of the 327th Glider Regiment. This regiment, having arrived on D plus 2 by sea, was immediately committed. Also attached were eight light tanks, five six pounder anti-tank guns and five 37mm guns. The 377th Field Artillery Battalion also had a small group of personnel and one gun salvaged from the D day jump employed.

(25) A-6, p. 10

(26) A-4, p. 70-75

The Third Battalion of the 327th Glider Regiment was to skirt the east of the town, advance to the main road beyond the town, then go to the Carentan causeway and blow the bridges. In the center of the attacking force, just north of Les Droueries was the Third Battalion of the 501st, which was to attack the main highway just to the south of St. Come du Mont. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 506th were to drive directly on the town.

The attack started at 0445, preceded by fire on fifteen targets which had previously been registered. By 0645, the 65th Field Artillery had fired approximately 2500 rounds. In the attack, the Third Battalion of the 501st ran into the heaviest resistance at Les Droueries.

Troops had reached the line of departure just before the jump off and were near exhaustion. Company D of the 506th went to Vierville, where it had fought previously, mistaking its mission. It then swung north along the road to St. Come du Mont. Company A of the 506th followed Company D in the advance. Part of Company A failed to get the attack order. The whole operation stalled on Dead Man's Corner, south of Les Droueries. The 501st brushed the flanks of the 327th and in front of the 501st was the 506th. Colonel Ewell of the 501st requested the First Battalion of the 506th to pull out of his sector. The First Battalion, though ordered to move to the west by Colonel Sink, had become immobilized by engaging in hedgerow fighting in the fields east of St. Come du Mont. Company H of the 506th Parachute Infantry made what was to have been the battalions advance from the east. This unit penetrated the first line of houses on the eastern edge of St. Come du Mont but ^{was} forced back.

At 0800, the Third Battalion of the 501st, under Colonel Ewell, reached the main highway just above the junction of the Vierville road. He moved the battalion south along the highway to seize the causeway and bridges, but was met by heavy machine gun fire from the buildings at the first

bridge at Pont du Douve, supplemented by 88mm fire coming from Carentan. He pulled his battalion back to the east of the Carentan - St. Come du Mont road. The Germans counter-attacked from the north, coming down both sides of the road from St. Come du Mont. The First Battalion of the 506th met this threat from the north, then turned toward St. Come du Mont. At 1430, Colonel Ewell's Third Battalion of the 501st stormed the hill to the west of the Carentan - Cherbourg road which gave the paratroopers an east - west line straddling the road and facing north. Forty casualties, either killed or wounded, were suffered during the day out of the one hundred and sixty who had started fighting with Colonel Ewell.

The Glider Battalion, which had remained in position in the rear during the day, was ordered to proceed to Colonel Ewell's right. By the time the reinforcement was effected the Germans withdrew. At 1600, a patrol from the First Battalion of the 506th entered St. Come du Mont and found it empty. (27) See Map (F)

ACTIVITIES ON THE EIGHTH, NINTH AND TENTH OF JUNE

Carentan, the next major objective of the Division was not to be secured until 14 June 1944. However, during the period 8, 9, and 10 June, reconnaissance elements of the Division were in contact with the enemy on the town's outskirts. The need for the repair of the bridges leading to the town was one of the reasons for the delay in the attack. On the tenth, the Second Battalion of the 502nd spearheading the 506th Regiment had taken positions along the Carentan - St Come du Mont highway, a mile northwest of the town. The First and Second Battalions of the 327th Glider Regiment, as well as the 501st Parachute Regiment, had cut the highway leading from the town to the east. (28)

(27) - A-1, p. 154-159

(28) A-4, p. 78-87

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1 SUPPLY

The 101st Airborne Division arranged to have one day of Class 1, III, V, medical and certain Class 2 signal supplies prestocked at the resupply departure fields. The Division Administrative Order stated that these stocks were to be available on call. Actually, however, on D day plus one, a full parachute resupply serial was flown for the Division on an automatic basis. Only four transports were lost during flight out of a total of one hundred and eighteen planes committed.

The Division delegated many resupply arrangements to the Air Forces. The Division G-4 was taken to the combat area in the initial serial. Initial resupply by air is so vital that adequate staff representation with efficient communication forward is essential.

Supplies should be accurately delivered in small lots as called for by local combat commanders rather than dropped in mass over a wide area. Large scale parachute resupply drops proved wasteful. (29)✓

Supply, other than that supplied by air, was to have been the responsibility of the Corps to which attached until supply was taken over by Army. (30)✓

2. MISSION

The mission of the Division was well selected and the operation not only contributed to the rapid reduction of the Utah Beach Defenses, but also expedited the attainment of depth in the beachhead. The operation proved that landings, not only of paratroopers, but of glider troops as well, can be successfully made at night. The timing of the drop in the hours of darkness had a devastating effect upon the enemy in that he became confused and was unable to make a timely estimate of the strength of our forces nor of their objectives. The use of Airborne Troops forces the enemy

(29) A-6, p 6

(30) A-9, p 119

to take more widespread defensive measures of vital installations thus slowing down his ability to take aggressive action. The operation demonstrated that airborne troops can be successfully used to seize,, hold or otherwise exploit important tactical localities in conjunction with or pending the arrival of other forces. It demonstrated, in particular, that Airborne elements are needed to assist amphibious forces to gain a foothold on a fortified coast line.

3. AIR SUPPORT

W-107
D-107
107
Aircraft should accompany airborne units in flight to reconnoitre and attack enemy positions impeding the flight of the Airborne Units.

4. EQUIPMENT

Losses of pathfinder equipment sustained in this operation points to the necessity of dropping duplicate sets of directional aids on each drop zone. Component parts of each navigational aid should be jumped by one man to avoid loss of parts and time required for their assembly. In the operation under discussion, parts of one directional aid were in some cases carried by two men who became separated in the landing thus rendering the aid inoperable. (31)

Directional lights that can be seen for great distances by enemy ground forces must be avoided and effort must be made to develop methods of marking drop zones that cannot be detected by the enemy.

Transport planes should be equipped with self-sealing gas tanks and light armor in vital points to furnish protection against small arms fire. (32)

A great deal of the property abandoned at the time of the landing could have been saved by more rigid inspection of individual loads at departure areas. It is impractical to participate in a night operation burdened by excess food and clothing. (33)

(31) A-6, p 5

(32) A-6, p. 12

(33) A-6, p. 13

5. ORGANIZATION OF AIRBORNE DIVISION

Airborne Divisions should not contain a large proportion of personnel and equipment incapable of being transported by air, otherwise important ground action must in some cases await the arrival of reinforcements.

Tables of organization should provide that extra staff officers be allotted major airborne headquarters in order to furnish replacements of key staff officers lost in action.

The operation proved the desirability of a counterpart of the British Airborne Command. The American Airborne Divisions had to complete most of their arrangements independently. (34)

6. LANDINGS

Landings, not only of the Pathfinders, but also of those who were to follow, took place astride roads near enemy defensive positions. Group D of the Pathfinders was dropped along a road defended by two enemy platoons reinforced by mortars. As a result our forces suffered a forty-five percent casualty rate. (35)

Large losses sustained in the landing of the Horsa gliders teaches the desirability of a detailed study of landing terrain and a proper selection of landing equipment suitable for the terrain.

LESSONS

1. Planning of Airborne Operations must be carried out in minute detail and the execution of the plan must be properly supervised.
2. Landings by glider troops as well as by paratroopers can be successfully made at night. Training must include a considerable portion of night fighting.
3. Close logistical support of Airborne troops must be made.

(34) A-6, p. 12

(35) A-6, p. 12

- #5
PCC
4. Personnel and equipment of Airborne units should be capable of being transported by air.
 5. Drop zones for paratroopers and landing fields for gliders must be carefully selected. Full use must be made of all intelligence pertaining to the target area and the type of equipment available for use must be considered.
 6. Immediate replacements of key personnel for Airborne Units should be made available.
 7. Supply problems must not, if avoidable, be delegated and should be closely supervised by unit personnel.
 8. Air support should be immediately available to attack ground targets.
 9. Air-ground communication should be improved to reduce the time lag between the request for a mission and its execution.
 10. Airborne Divisions should work under an Airborne Command rather than independently.